

President's Interview



One on One with Alainna R. Mire, 80th LSBA President: “2020 Vision for the Future” with Focus on Diversity, Inclusion and Technology for All

Interviewed by Shayna L. Sonnier

Alainna R. Mire, chief resilience officer and an assistant attorney for the City of Alexandria, was installed June 11 as the 80th president of the Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA) during a ceremony at the Louisiana Supreme Court. Administering her oath of office was Louisiana Supreme Court Chief Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson.

Mire received a BA degree in political science in 2000 from Louisiana State University and her JD/BCL degree in 2004 from LSU Paul M. Hebert Law Center. She was admitted to practice in Louisiana in 2004.

She served as LSBA president-elect in 2019-20 and was a member of the Executive Committee, the Budget Committee and the Bar Governance Committee. She is a member of the Access to Justice Commission. She served as secretary and Louisiana Bar Journal editor in 2015-17. She served as LSBA Young Lawyers Division chair, chair-elect, secretary and District 6 representative. She served on the LSBA's Board of Governors as House of Delegates



Liaison Committee chair and was a member of the LSBA's Legislation Committee, the Community Action Committee and the Public Information Committee. She served on the Louisiana Bar Foundation's (LBF) Board and its Budget Committee and co-chaired the LBF's Membership Committee.

A former officer of the Central Louisiana Pro Bono Project and chair of the Alexandria Bar Association's Young Lawyers Council, she is a member of the Alexandria Bar Association and the American Bar Association. She is a former chair of the United Way of Central Louisiana.

(Left) Alainna R. Mire, the 80th president of the Louisiana State Bar Association. Photo by Sarah Boehringer, Kinetix.

(Above) Shayna L. Sonnier presented Alainna R. Mire with an award commemorating her service as Young Lawyer Section chair for 2010-11 at the 2011 LSBA Annual Meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada. Photo from LSBA Archives.



At the 2019 Red Mass at the Louisiana Supreme Court, from left, S. Guy deLaup, Robert A. Kutcher, Alainna R. Mire and Patrick A. Talley, Jr.

Sonnier: You are now the 80th president of the Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA). How do you feel about that?

Mire: I'm very excited to know there were 79 other wonderful individuals ahead of me and I get to be 80.

Sonnier: What are you looking forward to most this year?

Mire: Honestly, I'm looking forward to trying to just get back to basics as far as getting everyone together. I believe the foundation of any organization should be togetherness, unity and being on one page. That's something that we, as the LSBA, need right now, given our current climate with COVID and everything going on.

Sonnier: I know the LSBA has made huge strides in utilizing Zoom, webinars and other methods to allow people to do things face-to-face, albeit virtual. Will the Bar continue working on that if we're not allowed to meet as soon as we'd like?

Mire: Yes. That's very important. When I was running for this president's position, one of the things I wanted to focus on was technology and making sure that the entirety of our members and the

state had access. That's something that I know is really big right now, as far as in the Legislature with the rural broadband access on the local level and the federal level. In a way, COVID has actually helped all of us embrace technology. Some of our members have embraced it a little better than others, but we're going to work on that. We're going to work on everyone to be receptive to technology. That way, even though you're alone, we're still going to be together.

Sonnier: You've been involved with the LSBA in various forms for quite a long time. Since I've known you all that time (we're not going to go into how far back that goes because no one needs to date us), let's talk about your different leadership roles. You started out with the Young Lawyers Council and moved up through leadership. How do you think that's prepared you for the president's position?

Mire: When I started with the Young Lawyers, it wasn't even a Division yet. It was the Young Lawyers Section. So, I will date myself. Through that experience, I've met some really great people. To move up through the association, I ran for LSBA secretary and actually learned more about

the election process during that time. With all my leadership posts, it was always nice to meet people from outside of my area. Even though I'm from Scott, Louisiana, I live and work in Alexandria. Meeting people from all over the state is important because different areas have different ways of practice. The court rules are different, the courthouse is different, and there are always those unspoken rules. But, really, after I completed my service as past chair of the Young Lawyers Section, I honestly thought I was done and was going to take a break. But being involved in the LSBA is just in my blood. It's something that I really want to do. I next became involved through the House of Delegates, serving as House of Delegates liaison committee chair to the Board of Governors. Also previously I served on the Board of Governors as Young Lawyers Section chair, prior to running for secretary and here I am. During that time, there have definitely been different challenges for the association and membership has changed. Now, we have a lot more younger lawyers in the association, which we're super excited about. Even though I was "aged out" of the Young Lawyers Division not too long ago, I'm never going to let that go. But we've been able to embrace new things. The Young Lawyers Division and the Board of Governors have been able to work well together, so we can represent our entire state and its membership.

Sonnier: While speaking of that, a lot of what you've done for the LSBA you did while a young lawyer. Are you going to take that mantle to inspire our Young Lawyers Division and our younger members?

Mire: Yes, I believe you can get involved with the LSBA whenever you're ready to get involved. Don't let the fact of being a young lawyer hold you back. If someone had told me when I started on the Young Lawyers Council in my early to mid-20s that I would be in the position of LSBA president now at my age today, I would never have thought it possible. I meet people all the time who ask how I did it. My answer is it's something that I really wanted and I worked hard for it. It's just like when you're in a law firm. There are people who want to be partner. There are people who want to be solos and have their

own practice or those who want to be in-house counsel. If you want it bad enough, you work at it. Don't ever let anyone tell you that it's not your time or this is not for you. You know when it's your time. You know when it's for you. When you're ready, you work for it. I'm just super excited that I'm able to let other people know that you can do that, too. The only thing that will hold you back is yourself.

Sonnier: In being involved with the LSBA, what has truly inspired you? Clearly, you love it. Clearly, you're committed to it. But is there one particular thing that jumps out at you from your experiences with the LSBA that has really inspired you and solidified your attitude?

Mire: I know I tell people this all the time when they meet me. But the first LSBA president that I ever met was Guy deLaup. When I met Guy at my first orientation, he was so welcoming to me and all the other young lawyers, saying, "Get involved, you can do things." At that time, I really had no involvement. I was recently out of law school. I didn't really understand the association and what was going on. Because Guy was so welcoming and, every time he saw me, he was so nice to me, I thought, wow, I really do want to be involved here. Then, you continue to meet others who have that same vision. I remember when I met Wayne Lee, who was the first African-American president of the LSBA, at the Young Lawyers Section Diversity Luncheon. (The Diversity Committee actually started with the Young Lawyers.) I saw Wayne Lee there and I was super nervous to meet him. But I walked up to him, told him who I was, that I was on the Young Lawyers Council, and I just wanted to say hi and introduce myself. He was just so very nice to me. He is someone that I truly respect and admire. Since then, I've met so many wonderful presidents and, because of them, it's the reason that I am involved because they let me know that I can be involved. That's what I want everyone to understand. The LSBA is for all of us, whether you're younger, whether you're older, whether you're a plaintiff's lawyer, a defense lawyer, a prosecutor, a criminal defense attorney, or in-house counsel. It's for all of us. I'm a government lawyer. So, the LSBA is for me, too.



While practicing safe social distancing, Shayna L. Sonnier interviewed Alainna R. Mire at the closed Bar Center during the pandemic. Photo by Barbara Baldwin.

A Little Q&A on President Alainna R. Mire

Q: What's one thing you want LSBA members to know about you?

A: I have a little dog named Beaux and he's adorable!

Q: What are your plans for your term as LSBA president?

A: Although some of my plans for the year have changed, I am still interested in promoting technology for the rural members of our state and increasing membership activities for our diverse community.

Q: What is your favorite quote about leadership?

A: "The essence of a great leader is influence, not authority."

Q: What are you looking forward to during your term?

A: Even though things are different now, hey, at least we get to be alone together.



In 2011, Alaina Mire volunteers her time at a Wills for Heroes event, a program operated by the Young Lawyers Division that provides wills to first responders. Photo provided by LSBA archives.

Sonnier: In talking about the LSBA being for everyone, you know there's always discussion about how everything is focused south of I-10, with the rest of the state not included. Obviously, you live north of I-10. Have you developed any plans or do you have any strategies about how you're going to help our colleagues in the northern part of the state feel truly included?

Mire: I know there was some discussion many years ago when the LSBA was looking to open a satellite office in north Louisiana, which didn't really work for us as far as logistics and financing. In the area of CLEs, I am in the central part of the state and I will be very honest with you. There are no LSBA-sponsored CLEs in my part of the state. That's not OK. There has been some access in other parts of the state via the Four Corners CLEs. We have to move things to where the people are. The Louisiana Attorney Disciplinary Board has done a great job with hosting their free CLEs all over the state. There's no reason we can't do the same thing. So, we are going to do that. That is going to be one of my biggest pushes, in addition to the technology issues. We want our members involved and we want them to know we will come to you because you are a part of us. We're all one. I know people speak of diversity a lot, but they don't necessarily see it as actually living areas, whether it's rural versus urban, young versus old.



Alaina Mire, Edward Mire, Shayna Sonnier and Sarah Mire when Alaina Mire was sworn in as YLD Chair, at the 2010 Annual Meeting in Destin, Florida. Photo by Matthew Hinton Photography.

But diversity encompasses all of that. As the LSBA, we are one organization, one entity. We have to make sure our members understand that. At the same time, we need help from our members in south Louisiana. If we invite you to an event in north Louisiana, the drive works both ways. You can come see us. I used to hear all the time, if I didn't call somebody back, "Oh, well, you didn't call me." Well, guess what? The phone works both ways. So does the Interstate. If I can go to you, you can come to me.

Sonnier: You mentioned how the Diversity Committee started with the Young Lawyers Section. It's now its own committee within the LSBA. Everybody is familiar with the climate right now. Has that inspired you or altered in some way your plans for how the Diversity Committee is going to work this year or what it's going to do?

Mire: One of the things I've struggled with over the years is that people have looked at diversity only through the term of race. But that's not the only diversity. At times, we, as women, have been left behind. There's still work to be done for women. There's still work to be done for African-Americans, for Pacific Islanders, for Hispanic communities. There's still work to be done, now more than ever with everything that is going on, especially starting with COVID and its disproportionate and negative impact in the African-

American and Hispanic communities. At the same time, you have to think about diversity in the sense that it's not just jobs or creating different things. As far as the money or capitalism, it really is looking at it from a health perspective. You have access to justice, but we need access to everything. That's something I think we do need to focus on. Unfortunately, this year with COVID, our Conclave on Diversity has been negatively impacted, but we're going to work to change that next year.

Sonnier: You were saying you're the fifth woman president of the LSBA and the fourth African-American president. How do you feel about that?

Mire: I'm very proud that I am number five as far as females. I'm also proud that I am numbered among the African-American presidents. I hope one day, though, that it gets to a point where it's not so easy to count, where we actually have to Google it to reference the number because there have been so many. I know we have to take those steps but it shows that we can change if we want it bad enough. That all starts with inclusion. We just talked about diversity, but, at the same time, if you brought me a chair to the table, but if I can't eat with you, then why am I there? So you can't just have diversity in name only. You have to be included. That's something that I want people to know, that everyone is included. Everyone can be involved. We just have to



Richard K. Leefe, Barry H. Grodsky, Dona Kay Renegar, S. Guy deLaup, Alaina R. Mire and Robert A. Kutcher at the 2019 Annual Meeting. Photo by Matthew Hinton Photography.



At the 2017 Annual Meeting, Alaina Mire presented the Stephen T. Victory Memorial Award to the Leadership LSBA 2015-16 Class for their work coordinating a special issue of the LBJ commemorating the LSBA's 75th Anniversary. Photo provided by LSBA archives.

get you going. That's what happened with me. I was included in a lot of different things. That made me realize not only the value of the work of the association, but my worth to the association and what I can bring to the association.

Sonnier: Let's talk about your theme for this year, "2020: Vision for the Future." What made you choose that theme?

Mire: It was a play on 20/20 vision as being perfect vision. With it being 2020 and the start of a new decade, I thought we were going to formulate a vision for the future that encompassed tying in all of our members and the entire state. One of the things I was trying to let people know is that, even though we have the Interstate transportation system, which connects the state physically, it sometimes creates a disconnect between our people, which is one of our greatest assets and resources within our profession. That, to me, is very unfortunate. There should be no I-49 divide, no north Louisiana versus south Louisiana. One of the things that I wanted to focus on was bringing us together, whether that was through technology or increased member outreach. That's what I plan on doing, really getting out there and meeting people. I want them to know that you can call us, and we will show up. We will be there for you. We can do all these different things.

I want our members to see that the vision for the future involves all of us. We are the vision. We have to do what's necessary to create that. That's what I want to foster.

Sonnier: Considering everything going on and the uncertainty about our future, did this make you feel that your theme is actually more on target than you originally thought?

Mire: It does, because I will say this, it made me think this definitely wasn't the vision that I had. All of us being basically alone together, but it has fostered togetherness. I wanted us to focus on technology and bring in the rural communities and that's something that's happening on the legislative side as well. At the LSBA, we've had to use a lot of technology during COVID to provide free resources and seminars for our members. This is a great thing we've been able to do. We already had a Blue Jeans video conference platform for our local affiliate bar centers that had their own buildings. Technology had already started to be at the forefront, but now we really see how important it is with all of us having Go-To meetings, happy hours and other events virtually. This is something we need to bring us together. So, I think whether I saw it or not, or anyone did, the vision for the future is technology. It's bringing us together, even though we may be in different areas and different parts of the state, in our homes or in our of-

fices. We still need to be together in some kind of way. We have to foster that collegiality and this is how we're doing it.

Sonnier: A big thing you've talked about throughout this interview is bringing everyone together and being inclusive. Let's talk about your Board of Governors for the 2020-21 Bar year. That's a rather diverse board. Would you like to elaborate more on that?

Mire: This is actually the most diverse Board of Governors we've ever had. I think that's remarkable as the new 80th president, being a young African-American female and having such a diverse board from our voting members. The majority is female. I don't think we've ever had that before. That also is remarkable because our profession has changed so much to being predominantly female. A lot more women are graduating from law schools and they're now being able to see themselves in leadership roles. This is an amazing thing and I'm very proud of the diversity on our board. We have a diverse board as far as the makeup of African-Americans as well. This is definitely now reflecting our profession. One of the things some people have said is the LSBA is an "old boys" club and that's not so anymore. The association might have been back then, but times are changing. We're changing and I'm very proud of it.



At the 2011 Annual Meeting, Karelia Stewart, Lauren McKnight and Alainna Mire attended the president's dinner in Las Vegas, Nevada. Photo provided by LSBA archives.

Sonnier: You've commented that you're from south Louisiana, from Scott specifically, and you've moved to Alexandria for work. Can you give us a bit of insight into your day-to-day work with the city? What does your work life entail?

Mire: Coming from private practice many years ago, I handled plaintiff's work for a while and some defense work. I was a law clerk, which I thoroughly enjoyed, and I would've probably done that for the rest of my life. Working for Judge John Davidson, I was his first law clerk. We grew up together in that sense as far as the court system, which was amazing. Then I eventually transitioned to the city. I didn't fully know about the inner workings of local government, as far as being on the inside and being legal counsel. I am a political science major, so I knew politics. I know governmental structure and different things, but I wasn't from Alexandria. This definitely was a learning curve to see how things worked. With most of our members being so diverse at times, I feel like we forget about those individuals who work for federal, state or local governments. That work is different from other areas of practice and my day-to-day duties can change at the drop of a hat. Some days, I may be advising our utility director about issues that we're having or I'm working with someone about policies and procedure. Or I could be talking to outside counsel and discussing strategies for a case they're handling for us. It really is different every day. In Alexandria, it is truly all-hands-on-

deck. We have a very limited staff, as far as the number of attorneys in-house. We all do a little bit of everything and, to be quite honest, I wouldn't have it any other way. I'm never bored. I'm always learning something different. There are things I probably wouldn't be exposed to if I wasn't doing the work that I do. I'm very proud of that. I want other people to know that we government attorneys are out there and we hit the ground running just like everyone else. It's just that our day-to-day looks different than someone in private practice.

Sonnier: Did that all-hands-on-deck experience you've had with your job help prepare you for the ebbs and flows of the LSBA?

Mire: Quite frankly, I think it has. There are times with different elections where our leadership changes, not just the administration, but our city council, too. With the legal division I work in, we are the go-between for the administration and the city council. We always have to work with a diverse group of people. The LSBA is very similar. We are a very diverse group of people and you have to be able to collaborate and work with other people. I said this before that I prefer to work through influence and not authority. That's something you have to do when you're in government, when you have to work across different aisles, whether it's party lines or different districts. While some people may be concerned with potholes in their district, others are concerned with adding ad-



At the 2016 Annual Meeting, Alainna R. Mire addresses the House of Delegates as the LSBA Secretary. Photo by Matthew Hinton Photography.

ditional lighting. Well, guess what? Those concerns are both valid. We just have to figure out how to work through those. I think it's the same thing with the many issues that we face at the LSBA. So, yes, I truly believe that my work experience has helped me face the challenges in the LSBA president's role.

Sonnier: We've talked a lot about what's inspired you and your different activities with the LSBA. What are some things you enjoy doing in your personal time? Who is Alainna Renee Mire when she's not wearing her LSBA hat?

Mire: I spend time with my dog, Beaux. If at all possible, I love to be at the beach. I like to be by water. I like to hang out with my friends. I'm actually very simple. That's it, boring?

Sonnier: You've not mentioned anything about LSU, which kind of surprises me.

Mire: Well, that's not my personal time. That's just who I am. Geaux Tigers!

Shayna L. Sonnier, a partner in the Lake Charles firm of Hunter, Hunter & Sonnier, L.L.C., served as 2018-20 treasurer for the Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA). She received a bachelor's degree in 2000 from the University of Louisiana-Lafayette and her law degree in 2003 from Dedman School of Law, Southern Methodist University. She also served as Fourth District representative on the LSBA's Board of Governors and served as chair, immediate past chair, chair-elect, secretary and District 4 representative on the LSBA's Young Lawyers Division Council. (ssonnier@hunterlaw.com; 1807 Lake St., Lake Charles, LA 70601)